

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC #041-2011

## LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO:

Mayor Matti Herrera Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM:

Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE:

February 16, 2011

SUBJECT: Structural Fires - Collins Park Neighborhood

The purpose of this LTC (Letter to Commission) is to communicate the events of the last week related to three (3) structural fires in the Collins Park Neighborhood, and inform you of the steps being taken by the City in order to protect other similar structures in the City, particularly in the City's Cultural Campus area.

Three (3) fires have occurred in the past seven (7) days at three (3) abandoned (vacant) buildings, which are contributing structures in the Historic District. Following is the summary of events:

- On Wednesday, February 9, 2011, at approximately 9:30 p.m., a fire was reported at 430 21<sup>st</sup> Street. The fire consumed the entire top floor and roof of the structure;
- On Monday, February 14, 2011, a fire was reported at approximately 12:15 a.m. at 318 20<sup>th</sup>
  Street. The fire consumed the top floor and the roof, with partial collapse of a section of the
  second floor:
- On Tuesday, February 15, 2011, a fire was reported at 425 20<sup>th</sup> Street at approximately 10:00p.m., which consumed the top floor and roof of the building.

The Miami Beach Fire Department (MBFD) responded and addressed each incident without any injuries to Fire Department staff or residents. In each case, the Fire Department conducted an interior attack of the fires, but was forced to vacate the structure when the fire breached the roof and made the inside conditions untenable. Particularly challenging, MBFD had to protect the exposures of surrounding buildings, which in many places are less than 10 feet away from the subject building. Fortunately, our Fire Department maintains fire plans to ensure an appropriate response in the event of any issues. As a result, these fires were quickly contained.

The State Fire Marshal's Office was brought in to investigate the first fire, and has remained on scene for the two subsequent fires. Samples have been taken and sent to the State Laboratory for analysis. At this time, the initial investigation shows multiple points of origin for the fires, and the cause is being ruled as incendiary, which simply means the fire was started by an open flame (not electrical, etc). The Miami Beach Police and Fire Departments are working closely with all appropriate agencies to investigate these recent incidents.

Given the similarity and proximity of these fires, the Miami Beach Police Department (MBPD), along with the State Fire Marshal's Office and Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) are also investigating these events. In addition to investigating these events, staff from MBPD and the Code Compliance Division are being appropriately deployed to ensure the protection of life and property.

In addition, the City has taken proactive measures to ensure other abandoned buildings throughout the City are properly secured. The Abandoned Properties Taskforce, which includes representatives from various City departments, is tracking abandoned properties and their conditions, as well as working with owners and lenders to ensure their proper maintenance.

As a result of recent incidents, the Taskforce has worked to assess the level to which these abandoned buildings in the approximate area are secured, and is working to address any issues wherever necessary, including securing the buildings on behalf of the owners, if needed.

In addition, please be advised that last night there were eight (8) small fires in dumpsters throughout the South Beach area. It is unclear at this time if these incidents are related to the three (3) structural fires.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

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